

LaGrange Challengers unite to expand amazing mission

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Above: LaGrange Challenger Bowling League members Rachael Rose, Colin Lawrence, Brian Conklin and Matt Kover sort items to be donated to the Dutchess County SPCA. Below: LaGrange Challenger Bowling League members and families gather behind the hundreds of items to be donated to the Dutchess County SPCA. Photos by Curtis Schmidt



Beale and Conklin and their families are hoping to continue this project by collecting school items for less fortunate children in the county.

The league has bowlers ranging in age from 5 to 70.

“We have kids with Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy and a variety of other special needs,” said Beale. “We use ramps and bumpers for those who need them. We do what we can to make each bowler successful and provide a fun experience for everyone.”

This all started in the summer of 2007. Beale said her son, Andrew, played baseball in the fall and spring and basketball in the winter. Most of the same kids played three sports and the parents were becoming friends.

“During our summer hiatus, I missed the families that I socialized with throughout the year,” said Beale. “I wanted to keep the kids and families together and needed a

sport that was not weather dependent and bowling fit the bill.”

She went to the Town of LaGrange for support and Holiday Bowl in Wappingers Falls for a place to bowl and both “jumped on board.” With the help of Jeff Feldman (Feldman, Kleidman, Coffey & Sappe), the league became a reality.

“In our first summer season, we had 56 kids. Before renovations (at the bowling alley), the league had 138 bowlers. After renovations, lanes were lost, so we filled the bowling alley with 108 bowlers which is the maximum amount of bowlers,” said Beale.

The mission of the league is to provide a recreational outlet that fosters friendships, independence, confidence and social skills in a non-threatening, non-judgmental environment for persons with special needs.

“Basically, it is a place where kids can be themselves and parents can relax while everyone has fun,” said Beale.

For insight as to how the activities of the

Challenger League help all involved, check out the comments of the parents themselves.

Briana, Linda and Colin Kelly

“What Sharon and Kurt Beale, and Marie Conklin do for our family members with disabilities is amazing. Our daughter, Briana, looks forward to every Wednesday night so she can go and bowl and have a great time with her friends and also has met new friends along the way.

“To see the smiles on the faces of all the bowlers and their family members who are watching is incredible.

“For Linda and myself to watch Briana having a great time and laughing with friends is one of the most wonderful feelings we’ve ever had - knowing how hard things are for Briana in her everyday life. I believe it is also therapeutic for Linda and myself as we worry about her all the time.”

Michael, Ellen and Leonard Viggiano

“Michael is 46 years old and has cerebral palsy, as well as developmental delays. He works part-time at IBM through a supported employment program of the Dutchess ARC.

“From bowling, Michael gets friends, camaraderie, competition, a sense of accomplishment and, above all, fun! He has become a good bowler. Recreational opportunities can be limited with this population, so having this league is important to his physical and mental well-being.

“As parents, we get a night out shared with Michael and the chance to see him compete against people who have become his friends. We get to meet other parents and caregivers and form friendships that grow from year to year.

“Since Sharon has added a charity component to the bowling league, this has become an opportunity for the bowlers to give back to their community. They like to feel needed, but volunteer opportunities are not always easy for them to find.”

Donald, Beatrice and Stephen Moffett

“My son has been on the Challenger Bowling League since it started. It gives him a chance to have an evening out with his peers, to practice working on his social skills and, more importantly, to just have fun in a safe, comfortable environment. The League also offers seasonal parties for the bowlers, which my son really enjoys attending. They have music, dancing and other outdoor activities.

“As a parent, the League has given me an opportunity to meet other parents, network and share information about programs, schools, and anything else that may come up when you have a child with a disability.

“We are very thankful that the Challenger Bowling League exists. It is run really well, and has given us a lot of opportunities that we would not have

had otherwise.”

Colin, Enza and Tom Lawrence

“The League is an important part of our son’s life. It allows him an opportunity to learn a sport at his own pace, which has increased his self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as develop his social skills.

“He has made and fostered meaningful friendships. They have fun playing the sport, as well as supporting and encouraging each other. It also helps us, as parents, to know our child is involved in an activity where his disability is not the focus, but his ability is the focus.

“It is also a time where we can set aside our children’s disabilities and encourage and support all of them on what they are accomplishing. We all have a lot of fun and share a lot of laughs. It is an all around positive experience for all.”

Bobby, Ava and Bob Leonard

“Our children, grown ups with special challenges, thrive in this club. It offers our challengers of all ages an opportunity to have fun and socialize, which leads to great friendships. As parents, it is refreshing to be a part of something that gives our children joy, teaches them competition, sharing and caring for each other.

“I love it when they cheer each other on, no matter if they got one pin down or a strike. We cannot say enough great things. Let’s go Challengers!

The sponsors of the league include the following: Feldman, Kleidman, Coffey & Sappe, Michael Connors - Jackson Hewitt Tax Services, Stewart’s Shops, Down syndrome Association - in honor of John Zimoulis and Parents of Autistic Children - Hudson Valley.

For more information, or to help out, visit the website at sites.google.com/site/lgchallengerbowling/.



Andrew Beale helps to sort items to be donated the Dutchess County SPCA. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

Special Olympics New York to kick off volunteer drive for 2020 Summer Games

On Wednesday, March 11, at 11 a.m., Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro, Special Olympics New York President and CEO Stacey Hengsternan, local officials and Games Organizing Committee members will announce the drive for volunteers for the upcoming Special Olympics New York 2020 Summer Games.

The announcement will be made at Schneider’s Fishkill Bowl, one of the venues that will host athletic competitions when the Summer Games return to Dutchess County on June 12-13. Schneider’s Fishkill Bowl is located at 110 Route 82 in the Town of Fishkill.

Local Special Olympics New York athletes will join officials in an appeal for volunteers. The 2020 Summer Games will require the help of approximately 2,000 local volunteers, as the competitions will draw nearly 1,500 athletes and coaches from across New York State, competing in eight different athletic events.

Special Olympics New York officials will also discuss the events and venues that will be part of the 2020 Summer Games. County Executive Molinaro, as well as Special Olympics NY officials and athletes will then take it to the lanes to participate in a unified bowling experience.



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